

[MacCurrie]

15

ORIGINAL MSS. OR FIELD NOTES (Check one)

PUB. Living Lore in New England

(Connecticut)

TITLE Connecticut Clockmaker (MacCurrie)

WRITER Francis Donovan

DATE 1/20/39 WDS. PP. 5

CHECKER DATE

SOURCES GIVEN (?) Interview

COMMENTS

W15101

“Living Lore in N.E.” series

Francis Donovan

Thomaston, Conn.

Jan. 20, 1939

Library of Congress

"I see our friend George has got a temporary job," says Mr. MacCurrie as I join him at his usual post by the window. "He's goin' to work up here in the Center market for a while. The lad owns the place has got appendicitis. They took him to the hospital this mornin', George said, and they called up to see if George wouldn't work in his place.

"George said sure he'd help out for a few weeks. Independent sort of a lad, George is. He's got a little money, I imagine."

Having vouchsafed this bit of information, Mr. MacCurrie takes up the paper he was reading when I entered. It is too early for the afternoon edition of the Waterbury paper, and I glance over Mr. MacCurrie's shoulder to discover that he is perusing the "People's Journal," published, I believe at Inverallochy, Scotland and sent periodically to Thomaston. Arrival of the People's Journal generally signals the spiritual departure of Mr. MacCurrie from the Fire House. The MacCurrie occupying the chair by the window is merely a substantial shell. MacCurrie proper is thousands of miles away among the bluebells and the heather, or the shipyards and the herring, of the little fishing village in Northern Scotland where he was born.

Fortunately, however, Mr. MacCurrie has reached the advertisements in the last few pages of the paper. This means that the football scores of myriad leagues, professional and amateur, have been duly noted, that proper attention has been paid to editorials and pertinent reading matter and that it will be only a matter of minutes before the Journal is folded up and placed in an overcoat pocket. Meanwhile we are joined by Mr. Joseph Philips, a member in good standing, who is employed on the night shift of a Waterbury 2 brass mill. Mr. Philips, having passed the time of day, remarks that he has nothing to do until Monday.

"They put us on four days a week," he says. "But I wasn't surprised. The tube mill is slow. They're always slow this time of year. Don't ask me why, I don't know. I been working

Library of Congress

down there fifteen years. And the only year they weren't slow in January was the year the N.R.A. went in.

"What do you think is the cause of all this unemployment? They laid off some of the fellas they hired last November. Why? Too many machines. Too much production. Ten years ago, if we straightened twelve thousand feet of half inch or three quarter inch stock it was a good night's work. Now we got to straighten forty-five thousand.

"You're a sensible fella, I can tell you that and you can see where I'm right. You can't tell some of them. Too many machines. They got ten million unemployed today, ain't they? All right. Ten years from now they'll have twenty million unemployed.

"Some fellas will try to tell you that these machines make work. They give work to the lads that make 'em. All right. But for every one they make work for, they throw ten out of work.

"I was over through Willimantic a little while ago. There's the American Thread Company over there. Ten years ago they employed thousands. Now they employ maybe five hundred. Why? They got machines workin' where they used to have men. They built a big addition to their factory. It's standin' idle. A waste of money. Somebody's holdin' the bag for it.

"Where's it goin' to end? Maybe they ought to shut down the patent office for a while."

3

Mr. MacCurrie folds his paper carefully.

"You're a politician, Joe. You ought to be able to tell what's the trouble." (Mr. Philips is a member of the Democratic town committee. Mr. MacCurrie, except in town politics, is rabidly Republican.)

Library of Congress

Mr. Philips (with heavy sarcasm) "Well, I suppose the thing to do is turn the country over to the Republicans. Or give it back to the Indians."

Mr. MacCurrie: "You see what Baldwin (new G.O.P. Governor) did today? He recommended a balanced budget. Laid it all out for them."

Mr. Philips: "Andrew, it's just like Roos-a-velt said: the Republicans can holler for a balanced budget and at the same time be thinkin' up ways to raid the Treasury."

Mr. MacCurrie: "What the hell are you talkin' about? Why goddomit, this state always had a balanced budget till the Democrats got in. The Democrats put them in a hole. Goddomit they always paid as they went."

Mr. Philips: "Did this town always have a balanced budget? How about this town? They been Republican since God wore short pants and they've always been in a hole."

Mr. MacCurrie: "That's the voters' fault. Goddomit the selectmen can't put anything through without the consent of the voters, can they? They go to town meetings and they vote for such goddom foolishness as a new athletic field and the like o' that. No wonder they're in a hole."

Mr. Philips: "What about that fifty-four thousand dollar bond issue that Bradley put through? Did they get the voters' consent for that? They did like hell. No Andrew, three or four of the big shots in this town get together and they tell the selectmen what they'd like to have done, and by God it's done, and you know it. What'd they give it to the Colonial Trust Company in Waterbury at six per cent for? They could have shopped around and got a lower rate than that."

Mr. MacCurrie: "The voters have got to give their consent before the selectmen can do a goddom thing."

Library of Congress

Mr. Philips: "Since when did you begin to stick up for the selectmen? I thought you always said they gave you a dirty deal -"

Mr. MacCurrie: "Well, well-----"

Mr. Philips: "Look at the roads in this town. They been workin' on them for four-five years under state and federal grants. And look at 'em My God, some of them should be paved with gold bricks, the money they spent on them. And look at 'em over in Terryville. Boy, they got roads over there. What's the answer? They didn't get any more money than this town did. But they got an efficient selectman."

Mr. MacCurrie: "Oh hell, there's no use talkin' to you, Joe."

Mr. Philips winks broadly at me, nods his head in the direction of Mr. MacCurrie, who is making much business of opening *The People's Journal*. It is plain that Mr. Philips believes he has won a moral victory. His subsequent remarks are addressed to me.

"You won't find a town or city in this country where there isn't somethin' questionable goin' on. Maybe on a big scale; maybe on a small scale. That's human nature. Double machine politics, 5 that's the trouble. When a man gets elected to office right away he begins to ask himself what can I get out of it.

"Well, I believe I'll get along home and see what the neighbors brought in. See you later. See you later Andrew."

"So long, Joe," says Mr. MacCurrie. As the door closes behind Mr. Philips he folds the *People's Journal* once more, smiles somewhat sheepishly.

Library of Congress

“Politics is a funny thing, ain't it? You can have more goddom arguments . . .” Mr. MacCurrie refreshes himself from the snuffbox. “I think I see the paper boy come. Better go oot and get it before Norton gets here. I'll beat him to it, for once.”